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ABSTRACT

Although the belief that women are not socialized to be competitive is widely held, research findings in this area are not conclusive. To compare the behaviors and the perceptions of behavior in men and women in a realistic setting, 180 students participated in a 2-hour, two-part simulated job interview that required either competitive or neutral behaviors for success. Both self-report measures and content coding of actual behavior were used. Results were analyzed separately for single-sex and mixed-sex pairs. Few differences emerged in single-sex pairs, but large and consistent gender differences in competitive and affiliative behaviors emerged in the mixed-sex pairs, usually of a stereotypic nature. Men in mixed-sex pairs made more positive statements about themselves and reported being concerned with looking strong. Women in mixed-sex pairs reported trying to avoid conflict. Responses to the competitive and neutral settings were similar. Results suggest that women are capable of acting as competitively as men but may choose not to do so when interacting with men. Men, on the other hand, maintain their competitiveness. (JAC)

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The Competitive Behaviors of Men and Women: Is There a Difference?

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The Competitive Behaviors of Women & Men:

Is There a Difference?

This study investigated the behaviors and perceptions of behaviors of men and women in a realistic job setting. Men and women, in same-sex and mixed-sex pairs, participated in a simulated job interview that required either competitive or neutral behaviors for success. We hoped to determine whether or not women and men do in fact differ in their behaviors and/or perceptions in a non-game, competitive situation. Results of behavioral and self-report data indicate that the manipulation was very strong. Few differences emerged between male-male and female-female pairs but large and consistent gender differences emerged in the mixed-sex pairs in competitive and affiliative behaviors. Questions beyond the commonly known stereotypic self-presentational concerns explaining these results are raised.

Gender Differences, Competition in the Workforce

The Competitive Behaviors of Women and Men: Is There a Difference?

This study investigated the behaviors and perceptions of behavior of men and women in a job interview setting. Of all the changes taking place in the labor force, none has been more visible or more significant than the increase in the number of women who hold jobs (Young, 1980). In spite of this fact, the pattern of their employment has not undergone radical change; the majority of women in the workforce are still concentrated in traditionally "feminine" low paying jobs (Taylor & Ilgen, 1981).

One of the most frequently cited causes of this phenomena is women's supposed lack of the "male skills" required to perform successfully in traditionally male jobs (Rosen & Jerdee, 1973; Kanter, 1977; Cast et. al., 1977). Men's working climate is frequently and aptly described as characterized by competitiveness and an individualistic attitude (Kanter, 1977). Much research indicates that women are not, stereotypically, seen as possessing the kind of assertive behaviors associated with competitiveness and achievement (Broverman et. al., 1972; Deaux, 1976; Kanter 1977; Bunker & Bender, 1980). Shien (1973), for example, asked 300 male middle managers to rate "women in general", and "the successful middle manager" on 92 descriptive terms. She found that the traits ascribed to successful middle managers and men in general were almost identical while those attributed to women diverged greatly.

Though the belief that women are not socialized to be competitive is widely held, research on the question is not conclusive. Most studies of competition use game situations where the normative structure permits

competition for both men and women. Yet even these studies have yielded mixed results (Krauss, 1977; Becker & Mills, 1978; Moley, et. al., 1979). A number of studies have shown men acting more cooperatively than women; many others, women acting more cooperatively than men. Rubin and Brown (1975) have analyzed these findings and propose that situational variables are more salient to women than men. A woman will act competitively in certain situations if interpersonal factors and demand characteristics influence them in this direction. Thus, it can be argued that women are able to act competitively in the game situations usually used to elicit competitive behaviors as in this setting it is socially acceptable. It has frequently been found, in fact, that in other settings, women will attempt to restructure the situation to remove the competitive elements (Vinacke, 1969; Bunker and Bender, 1980). There has been very little work examining the behaviors of women when they do compete in a naturalistic work setting. The purpose of this study was to devise a setting in which competition was unavoidable and the setting was realistic. We designed a competitive job interview setting so as to tap behaviors relevant to the working world. We hoped to determine whether or not women do, in fact, differ from men in their behaviors and/or perceptions in a competitive situation and whether the nature of the situation or the sex of the partner would have any additional effect.

Procedure: Subjects were 90 male and 90 female undergraduates drawn from the Introductory Psychology pool. The design was a 3 (sex-composition of pair) x 2 (competitive/neutral) design with male-male, female-female, and male-female pairs, a competitive condition and a neutral control.

The task was a 2 hour, two part simulated job interview. The interview was described as a pre-programmed group interview, a "new and different kind

of interview some companies are beginning to use when there are many applicants for a job opening." It involved almost no experimenter contact as it was controlled by pre-recorded instructions and the subjects' behavior was video-taped ostensibly to be viewed later by a "selection committee."

The interview consisted of two parts. First, subjects were asked to do two short (1-1/2 min.) self presentations and then briefly (1-1/2 min.) interview with the other person. Next, subjects were asked to prepare and make a presentation about one of two new products. They then had an opportunity to question each other and to critique the other's presentation. The competitive manipulation was effected throughout the instructions. Though identical in form and content, competitive and neutral instructions differed in several key phrases. For example, it was emphasized in the neutral condition that there were many job openings and that both subjects could be hired by the company. In the competitive condition, though, it was stated that only one of the subjects would get a job and it was important to make themselves look <u>better</u> than "their opponent."

Many Dependent measures were both self-report measures and content coding of actual behavior. Two questionnaires measured subjects perceptions. The first was given after the self-presentations; another, at the end. In addition, amount of time used in each portion was measure. Furthermore, a detailed content coding system was developed to analyze verbalizations of subjects. This system exhaustively coded each section of the experiment for key variables of interest. These variables included positive and negative statements about self and other, cooperative statements and questions asked. Groups of 2-3 coders coded all codes for each section of the experiment. Reliabilities between coders, within each sections, ranged between .81 and

1.00, with an average of .92.

Results and Discussion. Two separate analyses were performed. The scores of single-sex pairs (male-male and female-female) were summed and each pair treated as a unit in a standard 2 (male-male vs. female-female) x 2 (competitive vs. neutral) analysis of variance. The mixed-sex, male-female pairs were analyzed with a 1-between, 1-within repeated measures analysis. Sex of subject was treated as the within-cells variable while condition (competitive vs. neutral) was between. Thus, comparisons made between single-sex and mixed-sex pairs are not direct. These comparisons, when discussed below, are essentially inferential.

Results of both analyses indicate that the manipulation was extremely effective in that all subjects perceived the competitive condition as much more competitive than the neutral condition. For example, a question asking what approach subjects took, competitive or cooperative, yielded highly significant results in the expected direction for both single-sex (SS) pairs ($F(1,37) = 14.05$, $p < .001$) and mixed-sex (MS) pairs ($F(1,18) = 5.59$, $p < .03$). Behavioral data also indicated the strength of the manipulation. It was found, for example, that many more negative statements about the other's product were made in the competitive than in the neutral condition, for both the SS pairs ($F(1,37) = 35.16$, $p < .0001$) and the MS pairs ($F(1,18) = 4.03$, $p < .06$). Many other measures of degree of perceived and actual competitiveness yielded similarly strong results (see Table 1 for means).

When gender differences were evaluated, an interesting pattern emerged that was especially strong in variables relating to competition and affiliation. It was found that very few differences existed between single-sex pairs (i.e. male-male pairs behaved similarly and perceived the situation

similarly to female-female pairs). When both men and women were interacting with a member of the opposite sex, large differences emerged between men and women. Thus, men and women do not appear to differ greatly in either their behaviors or their perceptions of their behaviors, unless they are interaction with an individual of the other sex. When this is the case, large differences, usually of a stereotypic nature emerge.

Men, for example, in MS pairs, report "talking positively about themselves" ($F(1,18) = 64.66$, $p < .001$); being more concerned with "looking strong" ($F(1,18) = 229.31$, p .0001); trying harder to make themselves look better than the other ($F(1,18) = 5.12$, $p < .05$); more willing to criticize the other ($F(1,18) = 12.93$, $p < .01$) and to intimidate the other ($F(1,18) = 12.93$, $p < .01$). behaviorally they were found to make more positive statements about themselves ($F(1,18) = 38.19$, $p < .0001$) and to use more statements critical of the other ($F(1,18) = 44.41$, $p < .0001$).

Women, in MS pairs, felt friendlier towards the other in both MS ($F(1,18) = 73.34$, $p < .0001$) and SS pairs ($F(1,37) = 4.71$, $p < .05$). Women in the MS pairs also felt they had adjusted their behaviors more in response to the other individual ($F(1,18) = 69.91$, $p < .0001$) and that they had tried to avoid conflict ($F(1,18) = 10.91$, $p < .01$) more than men. (See Table 2.)

None of the above listed effects or any others (except where noted) proved significantly different between the male-male and female-female pairs. There were no differences in the amount of time men and women used. Very few interactions emerged; it appears that men and women respond quite similarly to the competitive and neutral settings.

Results indicate that the manipulation of competitiveness was strong and effective. Our first objective, to create a situation that was unambiguously

competitive, that required competitive behaviors for success, was thus realized.

The pattern of gender differences discovered was somewhat different from what we had expected to find. It appears that women are equally capable of acting as competitively as men when they are paired with another woman and that in this case they are not overly affected by affiliative or conciliatory concerns.

The most interesting pattern of this investigation emerges when females are paired with males. It appears that they choose not to behave competitively even though, as we have seen, they are perfectly capable of doing so. Men, on the other hand, maintain the same degree of competitiveness. It appears that women suppress their competitive tendencies and enhance their affiliative behaviors when interacting with men.

These reported results are particularly relevant to women's performance in the inner world of male dominated organizations. Women who wish to succeed in traditionally male realms are dealing directly with men. If women are not able to compete effectively in these situations, they are likely to suffer a disadvantage. It is extremely important that both men and women become aware of this pattern and that women are trained to compete as effectively with men as they do with women. Further research is needed to determine the sources and effects of the reported differences in women's behaviour. For example, do men do anything to encourage women's noncompetitive behaviors or does it occur regardless of specific male behaviors? Do females, if they try to compete with men, adopt the skills of males and would that create adverse effects, or could a specific female competitive set of behaviors be detected? If one were to make any generalizations based on this study, the old stereotype of females

fighting each other while "behaving" when males are around could be confirmed. In other words, women in general, are not lacking the potential of behaving in competitive fashion. How females can make use of their talent to compete in the presence of men is nevertheless still a point on the agenda for those concerned with a fairer distribution of work opportunities across the sexes.

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Table 1

Main Effects for Condition: Competitive vs. Neutral

	Competitive		Neutral	
	SS Pairs	MS Pais	SS Pairs	MS Pairs
1. Expect to take competitive approach	6.52	6.02	3.48	4.41
2. Negative Statements about other's product	7.00	1.29	5.60	3.34

Table 2

Gender Differences of Single-Sex and Mixed-Sex Pairs

	Means for SS Pairs Males	SS Pairs Female	P<	MS Pairs Males	MS Pairs Female	P<
1. Talking positively about self	10.16	9.39	ns	10.24	6.84	.0001
2. Concern with "looking strong"	9.00	8.91	ns	10.13	5.08	.001
3. Positive statements about self (beh.)	8.16	8.78	ns	8.32	4.87	.0001
4. Make self look better than other	6.27	5.56	ns	6.01	5.21	.05
5. Criticize other	4.55	5.65	ns	5.40	3.90	.01
6. Intimidate other	3.83	3.96	ns	1.90	0.30	.0001
7. Critical statements (beh.)	3.46	4.27	ns	3.14	0.53	.0001
8. Friendliness toward other	10.44	11.52	.05	10.26	13.96	.0001
9. Adjust behavior to other	[illegible]0	8.60	ns	8.30	12.30	.0001
10. Avoid conflict with other	9.55	9.39	ns	6.43	9.18	.0001